



File Code: 2820-2/1950

Date: September 5, 2007

Dear Interested Citizens:

The Ashley National Forest is starting environmental analysis on a proposal by Berry Petroleum Company (Berry) to drill up to 400 oil and gas wells within a 25,900 acre area of the South Unit of the Ashley National Forest. Because it is likely that the analysis will address controversial issues, and because implementation of the proposal could result in significant impacts, the analysis will be documented in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). A Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS for the proposal was published in the Federal Register on August 29, 2007. Publication of the Notice of Intent initiated a 45-day scoping period. Comments on the proposed action, resource issues, and alternatives to be considered are requested no later than October 12, 2007.

The U.S. Forest Service has prepared this scoping notice to inform interested and affected individuals and agency officials about this proposal and invite them to participate in the analysis process. Please review the information below and provide comments as detailed in the "Public Scoping Comments" section.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose and need for this project is to respond to a formal proposal from the Berry Petroleum Company (Berry), to exercise their lease rights, and develop oil and gas resources within their existing federal oil and gas leases, located on the South Unit of the Ashley National Forest. The purpose and need is also to identify the terms and conditions necessary to protect surface resources and minimize conflicts with other activities, programs and users in the area of operations.

Proposed Action

Berry has submitted a proposal to the U.S. Forest Service to drill up to 400 oil and gas wells on federal mineral leases the company holds on approximately 25,900 acres within the South Unit of the Ashley National Forest. Wells would be drilled from well pads constructed of native soil and rock material using standard cut and fill methods. Well pad construction would require an estimated 2.5 acres of surface disturbance per well pad. Approximately 100 miles of new access roads and 21 miles of upgraded existing roads would be constructed to reach the proposed well pad sites. The proposal calls for a 20-year construction and drilling period. The bulk of the proposed development would occur on the northeastern end of the South Unit, between Sowers Canyon and Left Fork Antelope Canyon, within Townships T6S-R5W and T6S R4W, Uintah Special Meridian.

Preliminary Issues Identification

Issues that may be analyzed in all alternatives include: the socioeconomic effects of oil and gas development and associated activities; effects on terrestrial and aquatic flora and fauna, including threatened and endangered species, sensitive species, and management indicator



species; effects on other activities in the area including livestock grazing and dispersed recreation; effects on air quality; effects on water resources, including wetlands, floodplains, riparian areas, private and municipal water systems, and groundwater; effects on visual resources; effects on soils and geologic hazards; effects on cultural resources; effects on upland and riparian vegetation; effects on other mineral resource extraction activities; and effects on noxious weeds and invasive species. Issues may be added or refined based on public comments and internal review.

Lead and Cooperating Agencies

The Forest Service is the lead agency. The Bureau of Land Management will participate as a cooperating agency. Other eligible agencies may also participate as cooperating agencies.

Nature of Decision to Be Made

The Forest Service will decide whether to allow development to occur as proposed or to allow implementation of a reasonable alternative to the proposed action. The selected alternative will establish the terms, conditions, and mitigations needed to protect surface resources during the proposed oil and gas development. The Responsible Official is Kevin B. Elliott, Forest Supervisor.

Public Participation in the Process

The U.S. Forest Service wants to ensure that interested and affected individuals and agency officials participate in the decision-making process. In particular, issues and concerns need to be communicated early in the process so they can be addressed in the EIS. To facilitate public participation, the Forest Service will make information available through news releases on the radio, in local papers, and the Ashley National Forest Projects and Plans web-site (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/ashley/projects/>). In addition, the Forest Service will mail information to interested parties and conduct public open house meetings. The input received at the public meetings will be coupled with other input to identify the concerns and issues that will be used to develop the draft and final EIS documents. Dates and locations of public meetings are as follows:

September 24, 2007, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.
Salt Lake City Library Downtown
Conference Room B
210 East 400 South
Salt Lake City, Utah 84111

September 25, 2007, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.
Duchesne County Administration Building
Commission Chambers
734 North Center Street
Duchesne, Utah 84021

September 26, 2007, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.
Western Park
302 East 400 South
Vernal, Utah 84078

The Forest Service requests comments on the nature and scope of the environmental, social, and economic issues, and possible alternatives specifically related to this proposal. Comments should be received no later than October 12, 2007, which is 45 days after the publication of the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register. Comments should be sent to:

David Herron, Project Lead, Ashley National Forest
355 North Vernal Avenue
Vernal, Utah 84078
Phone: (435) 781-5218
Email: comments-intermtn-ashley-duchesne@fs.fed.us

Comments may also be hand delivered to the above address during regular business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday-Friday, excluding federal holidays. Hand delivered comments must be time and date stamped at our office by close of business on October 12, 2007. It would be most useful for the Forest to receive your electronic comments in ms word (*.doc) or rich text format (*.rtf). Those using electronic means may submit a scanned signature. Otherwise, another means of verifying the identity of the individual or organizational representative may be necessary for electronically submitted comments or comments received by phone. This is pursuant to 36 CFR 215.6(a)(3)(b).

Comments received, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposal and will be available for public inspection.

Thank you for your continued interest in the management of the Ashley National Forest.

Sincerely,

/s/ Kevin B. Elliott
KEVIN B. ELLIOTT
Forest Supervisor